

# Newsweek

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Meeting in the middle: On the Glienicke bridge Abel (left) was exchanged for Powers (right)



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## FREEDOM BRIDGE

It is rarely the fate of one ordinary man to become the living symbol of both an international crisis and an international gesture of goodwill. Yet such was the destiny of a chubby young Virginian—Francis Gary Powers.

When Powers' U-2 plane crashed in Russia on May 1, 1960, it brought down with it all hopes of a successful summit conference between Nikita S. Khrushchev and President Eisenhower. Last week, as Powers crossed the white line at the center of a Berlin bridge, he seemed a human peace offering from Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

For Powers himself, an unwitting and unwilling carrier of old quarrels and new hopes, last week's events meant simply freedom after two years of fear and shame and imprisonment. The moment of freedom came quickly—but it had involved a complex operation.

In the Bonn suburb of Mehlem, one CIA agent told his secretary to cancel all appointments for four days and then took off by plane to Berlin. At almost the same time, orders were being cut in the code room at U.S. Air Force headquarters in Wiesbaden for two special flights. One was a Convair flight to and from Berlin; the other was a return transport flight to the U.S. Also converging on Berlin through different routes were at least five other CIA agents from Frankfurt and Washington. One of them had been

chosen because he could positively identify Francis Gary Powers. Three of the others were bringing the Soviet spy Col. Rudolf Abel to Berlin in the same plane that would take Powers home.

The rendezvous point was the Glienicke bridge which allows entrance into the U.S. sector of Berlin directly from Soviet-occupied East Germany and not from East Berlin. It is a dark-green steel structure bearing a now-forgotten plaque—"Bridge of Freedom"—which was placed there by U.S. and Russian occupying troops in 1945. On the Communist side, Vopos in mustard-colored uniforms stand guard with Tommy guns. On the U.S. side, there are West Berlin police in green uniforms. Across the center of the bridge is a 6-inch white strip. Here the exchange would take place.

**Drizzle.** The first to arrive at 8:15 Saturday morning was a U.S. Army Opel sedan which had approached through mists along the Koenigsstrasse. In a drizzle of rain, a U.S. colonel and three CIA men stepped out. Soon there were twenty Americans at the bridge. With them was Colonel Abel, huddled against the cold.

At 8:30 a.m. three Zil limousines drove up. The Russians had arrived, bringing Powers with them. The CIA man assigned to identify Powers picked out his man at 50 yards. Powers was flanked by guards and wore a fur hat and dirty

blue pants under his heavy winter coat.

The exchange was not immediate. For twenty minutes, the two groups waited silently while one of the Americans telephoned to the main Berlin crossing-point on the Friedrichstrasse, "Checkpoint Charlie," to make sure the East Germans were releasing a second American included in the swap, 28-year-old Frederic L. Pryor. The sun was just breaking through the mist over the Havel when word came of Pryor's release.

Both groups then walked from their respective ends of the bridge and met at the white line in the middle. There they paused and one of the Americans, glancing at Powers' trousers, attempted a wan wisecrack: "Look at those Russian striped pants."

The two prisoners crossed the border simultaneously. In four crisp steps, Abel stepped over the line and was promptly swallowed up in a group of outsize Soviet civilians swathed in box-cut greatcoats. A U.S. civilian reached across the line, touched Powers on the shoulder. The American seemed nervous but managed a faint grin. Within minutes he was airborne from Berlin to Wiesbaden. There he spent just twelve minutes on the ground before his waiting transport roared off for the U.S.

For the U.S., which felt responsibility if not much admiration for its downed spy, the exchange was the culmination